

A
CATECHISM,
SETTING FORTH THE PRINCIPLES
OF
PUBLIC COVENANTING.

IBR

W. H. R. R. D.

Qui fidem suam ex verbo Dei discit, habet, videt, tenet
certa scientia, clamante conscientia, is tuto et pie, occasione
ta erente, in eam jurare potest; juxta illud Prov xxiii, 23.
Tene veritatem. Apocal. iii, 11. Tene quod habes.
Tu age quod bonum est ad ædificationem proximi et ad
gloriam Dei, atque una ora Deum; ipsi confide et ab ipsius
gratia totus depende: cætera ipsius paternæ providentiæ com-
mitte. Psal. xxxvii, 5. Phillip. i. 6. Voetius de juramento
religionis.

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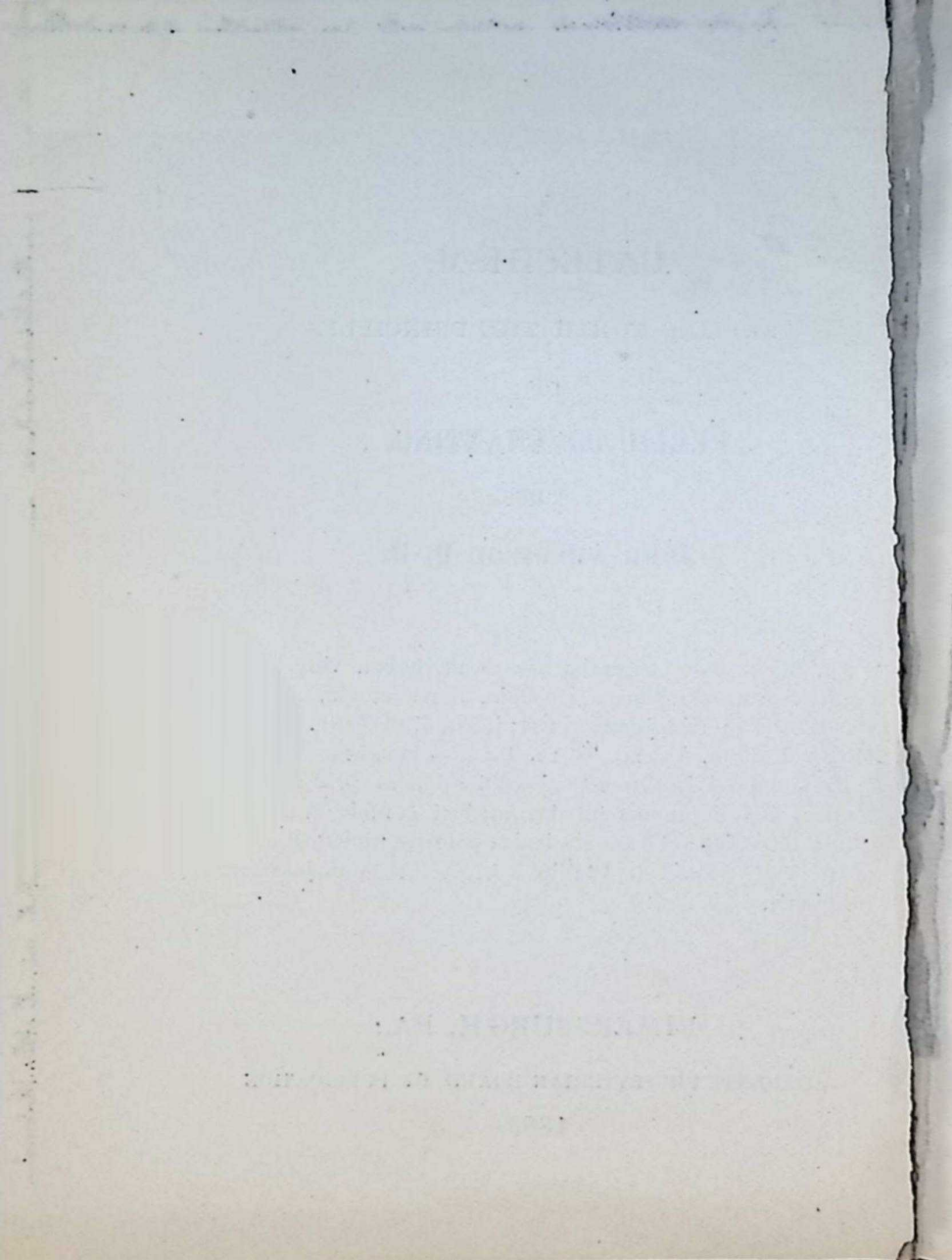
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PREFACE.

THE publishers present this third edition of this catechism to the public without apology. Public social covenanting has ever been a distinctive principle of the Secession church. She has not only embraced it in her judical testimony, but has, from time to time, according to the call of providence, engaged in this solemn act of divine worship. She has found it an important mean of expressing the covenant relation between the believer and God; of exciting to a more diligent search of the Scripture; of promoting mutual harmony and confidence; for promoting steadfastness in her profession; of affording an evidence of sincerity; and of impressing the world with the importance of the distinctive principles of her profession. In this exercise the covenanter engages to no new duty but declares upon oath that he believes the doctrine and practice of his church to be the very truth of God, and engages in the strength of promised grace to continue faithful to Christ and his cause. The unrest and spirit of change that moves the church of today is the chief reason why this ordinance is so much opposed. It carries with it a certainty of

knowledge, a fixedness of principle, and steadfastness in profession that is counter to the Spirit of our times. A declining church is not a covenanting one; it has only been practiced by those churches that were seeking to hold that to which they had attained.

This subject has been handled more largely by other judicious writers. The chief excellence of this treatise is that the explanation of public covenanting is particularly adapted to the bond of acknowledgement of sins, now used by congregations under the inspection of the Associate Synod of North America.

The writer says that he chose the form of a catechism "as being most suitable to his stating the most necessary things on the subject of public covenanting concisely, and yet in a familiar way suited to the weakest capacity."

It was first written for his own congregations, which had shortly before engaged in covenanting. He said that he desired to present the grounds on which they proceeded, and to put them in mind of the vows of God that are upon them. That it may prove the same blessing to those who now read it, and lead others to go forward in thus solemnly dedicating themselves to the Lord, is the end sought by the present republication.

A CATECHISM
ON PUBLIC COVENANTING.

SECTION 1.

OF THE COVENANT OF WORKS, AND OF MAN'S
FALLEN STATE.

Quest. IN what state did God make man. ?

Ans. God made man upright.

Q. In what did his original uprightness consist?

A In his perfect conformity to the moral law, which God had written in his heart.

Q. Was the moral law implied in the positive precept forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

A. Yes ; for he could not fulfil or break the one, without fulfilling or breaking the other., Adam's love to God and to his posterity, which he was to manifest by keeping the positive precept, was virtually all the obedience which the moral law required.

Q. Was the moral not law the moral law given to

Adam in the form of a covenant? A. Yes.

Q. How does this appear?

A. From the promise of life implied in the threatening of death. When God said, *If thou eat* the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. and in so doing, break the moral law, *thou shalt surely die*: it was plainly implied, that if he did not eat that fruit, and thus continued obedient to the moral law, he would live. ——— Now the law given to Adam, as it had the promise of eternal life annexed to it, is properly termed a covenant.

Q Was the life promised, as the reward of Adam's obedience, eternal life ?

A. Yes ; it cannot be denied, that the death threatened as the wages of sin, was eternal death: and therefore we justly infer. that the life promised was eternal life. For such is the life that stands opposed to the death which sin deserves, Rom. vi 21 "The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." And in other places of scripture, where the promise of life made to man's obedience at his creation, is repeated, it is expressly called eternal life. Thus when a young man enquired what good thing he should do in order that he might have eternal life ; our Lord answered. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" ;. Thus intimating that the life that was to be obtained upon condition of man's perfect obedience, was eter-

nal life. Matth xix. 16. 17.

Q Would not obedience, as it is naturally due to God from the rational creature, without any covenant have a just claim to eternal life?

A. By no means: man's perfect obedience, while he perseveres in it, secures his present happiness by the continuance of his peace with God, but does not naturally deserve any future or eternal reward at the hand of God. The perfect obedience of the rational creature on account of its absolute dependence on God, is a debt due to him: and no one is entitled to a future reward for the payment of a just debt. Luke xvii. 10.—“When ye have done all these things, say we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.”

Q. Are not the essential parts of a proper covenant conspicuous in the manner of God's dealing with Adam at his creation?

A Yes; for therein we have, 1st, a promise of eternal life; 2dly, a course of perfect obedience prescribed as the condition of that promise; and 3dly, Adam's consent necessarily implied in his original righteousness.

Q What farther evidence have we in scripture of this doctrine, that God made a covenant with Adam?

A It may justly be inferred from the declaration of God in Hosea vi. 7. “They, like Adam, have trans

gressed the covenant "but the fullest evidence of of this truth arises from the parallel between the Lord Jesus Christ the second man, and Adam the first man, 1 Cor. xv. 47. "The first man is of the earth earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven". These two could be no otherwise parallel than in their public character; as they were both federal heads, the one of his natural, the other of his spiritual seed. In this respect Adam was the figure of him that was to come, that is of Christ. Rom. v. 14..

Q. How does the equity of this appointment of Adam as our covenant head appear?

A. It is a sufficient answer to every cavil against this constitution, that it was such as seemed good to the infinite wisdom of God. None would have disputed the equity of this appointment, if Adam had stood upright during the time of his trial, and we had reaped the benefit of his integrity; and yet the equity of the appointment is the same in the case of his fall as it would have been if he had continued upright. It is reasonable to believe, that a more proper person for being the covenant-head and representative of mankind could not have been found: for he was their natural root: his own happiness was embarked on the same bottom with theirs; and he had all the natural and moral ability to stand that is com-

* So the text is rendered in the margin of our translation, agreeable to the original.

petent to a mere creature.

Q Are all men in their natural state under the law as a covenant of works?

A Yes.

Q. How does this appear?

A. The scripture teaches us, that it is the peculiar privilege of those who are under grace, that they are not under the law, Rom. vi. 14. vii. 4. this peculiar privilege is that they are not under it in the same sense in which all other men are under it; that is, they are not under it as a covenant requiring perfect obedience of them as the condition of eternal life and subjecting them to its curse for every failure: for none are more under the law, considered as a rule of life, than those who are under grace. 1 Cor. ix. 21. Hence it is evident that the law which all other men, that is, all that are in their natural state are under, must be the law or covenant of works.

Q. Does men's situation under the dispensation of the gospel exempt them from their natural subjection to the law, as a covenant before God?

A. By no means; for they still continue to be under the law, till they come to be under grace; or they are under their first husband the law, till they are married to Christ; and insatated in another covenant.

Q. Is it not inconsistent, to hold, that men are under the law as a covenant requiring them to work righteousness for their justification; and yet that they

are under the gospel dispensation requiring them to renounce their own righteousness, and trust only in the righteousness of another for that purpose?

A. There can be no inconsistency here, unless the law hath said, that it cannot admit of a surety for the sinner, however sufficient. But the law neither says nor ever did say so. It knew nothing of a surety before the revelation of one in the gospel; but it never excluded such a surety as God, in his infinite wisdom and grace, has provided. To the sinner under the gospel dispensation the law says, either answer my demands thyself, or find me a good and sufficient surety to answer them.

Q Can any of fallen mankind answer the demands of the law or covenant of works?

A No: the law requires a holy nature; but on account of Adam's first sin, the soul of man is now in its creation justly left without that righteousness which it had before the fall; and our nature having no righteousness, is totally depraved. The law enjoins perfect holiness in all our thoughts, words and actions. But nothing truly holy can proceed from a depraved nature: and therefore, whilst we are in our natural state, the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually. The law demands a satisfaction of infinite value for every sin on account of the infinite evil of sin as committed against the infinite majesty and goodness

of God. But no sufferings of the sinner, for the longest period of time, can be of infinite value; or of any avail to procure his deliverance from the wrath of God. Hence the punishment of sin, which the law threatens, is everlasting punishment.

Q. Have sinners any ground to hope, that the law's demands will be altered or set aside in their favour?

A. No; the law is an exact representation of God's essential righteousness; and therefore it must be right for God to deal with sinners according to its demands. And shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

Q. Is our condition, then, utterly desperate?

A. It is so, if we continue under the law, or covenant of works.

Q. Are not men under the guilt and dominion of sin, while they are under that broken covenant?

A. Yes; for the law is so far from making any provision for men's deliverance from sin, that it condemns every sinner to remain under spiritual death, that is, under the dominion of sin. Hence the apostle says, "the strength of sin is the law." 1 Cor. xv. 56.

Q. What is the guilt which they are under?

A. It is the obligation they are under by the law of God to suffer his everlasting wrath as the just punishment of sin.

Q. Can we conceive or express the greatness of the misery of those who suffer the wrath of God

of God in the other world?

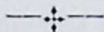
A. No; for who knoweth the power of his wrath.

Q. What is the reigning power which sin has over those who continue under the broken covenant?

A. It is the power which sin exerts in those who serve it as their chosen lord and master; and in whom there is no contrary principle of spiritual life inclining them to what is spiritually good.

Q. What is the filth or pollution of sin?

A. Its contrariety to the holy nature and will of God. In this respect sin is that abominable thing which God hates, rendering us odious in his sight, and incapable of communion with him.



SECTION I I.

OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE, AND OF THE GOSPEL.

Q. How may we be delivered from our perishing condition under the covenant of works?

A. By entering into the covenant of grace: for when we are under grace, we are no more under the law Rom. vi. 14.

Q. What is the covenant of grace?

A. It is the Divine counsel, in which the three persons of the Godhead agreed to act in distinct characters in the work of redemption.

Q. Does the scripture represent those Divine persons as distinct parties in that covenant?

Yes; the two contracting parties are the first and second persons of the Godhead. The Father is represented as making the covenant, Psalm lxxxix. 3. "I have made a covenant with my chosen one":—and the Son as undertaking to fulfil the condition of it, and saying to the Father, as in xl. Psalm, "Lo I come, I delight to do thy will", while the Holy spirit is a concurring party, undertaking to reveal this covenant to the souls of men, and to make them actual partakers of its promised blessings.

Q. Whom did the Son represent in this covenant?

A. All who, having been given to him by the Father, at last come to him; and these only.

Q. How does it appear that Christ is the head and representative of his people in the covenant of grace?

A. From his being called *the Second man* in opposition to *the First man*, 1 Corin. xv. 47.—from his bearing their name, as when he is called *the seed of the woman*, Gen. iii. 15, and *Israel*, Isa. xlix 3—from their being said to have been crucified with him, Gal. ii. 20, and risen with him, Coloss. iii. 1.

Q. What is the proper condition of the covenant of grace?

A. The righteousness wrought out by Jesus

Christ, as the head and surety of his people.

Q Is not this righteousness a complete answer to the threefold demand which the law of works has up on us?

A. Yes, for it includes the holiness of his human nature, the obedience of his life, and the satisfaction which he gave to the justice of God for our sins, and his suffering unto death.

Q. Why may we not allow faith or believing in Jesus Christ, to be the proper condition of the covenant of grace?

A. Because faith is a blessing promised in this covenant; and therefore is not its condition; The promise of faith was first made to Christ, it being included in that of *seeing his seed*; the condition of which was his *bearing their iniquities*; and it is made to us in him, Zech. xii. 10. 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced'; and Math. xii. 21. 'In his name shall the Gentiles trust.' Again, faith is entering in to the covenant of grace; and therefore is not its condition, for our entering into any covenant or contract is quite different from the performance of its condition. A covenant may be entered into; and yet its condition may never be fulfilled.

Q. Is not the opinion that faith is the condition of the covenant of grace inconsistent with the nature and exercise of saving faith?

A. Yes; for true faith does not regard itself but

the righteousness of Christ, which it apprehends, as the true ground of its claim to the promised blessings of the new covenant, its genuine language in pleading for these blessings being that of David in Psalm lxxi. 16. "I will make mention of thy righteousness even of thine only."

Q. What is the leading promise of the covenant of grace?

A. The promise of eternal life, I Jno. ii. 25. 'This is the promise, that he hath promised us even eternal life.'

Q. Are not many great and precious promises comprehended in that of eternal life?

A. Yes; such as promises of pardon, Isa. xliii. 25 "I even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." Jeri. xxxi. 34. "I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more"; — Promises of the Holy Spirit, and of regeneration and Sanctification, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. 27. "A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you. I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." Lev. xx. 8. "I am the Lord who sanctified you; promise of Divine teaching, Isai, xxix. 19. The eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity", John. vi 45. "It is written in the prophets, they shall be all taught of God." Isa. xlvi. 17 "I am the Lord thy

God who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee in the way that thou shouldst go ;” promises of spiritual strength, Zech. x. 12. “I will strengthen them in the Lord: they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord.” Joel iii. 16. “The Lord will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel.”

Q. What is the principal matter of the promise of eternal life?

A. The promise of a God in Christ as our own God: which comprehends all that is for our present and eternal advantage, Jer. xxxi. 23. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, saith the Lord; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Q. Is not the gospel of Christ preached to sinners, a proposal of God's free promise or grant of eternal life in Christ? A. Yes.

Q. Where is this grant or promise expressly mentioned?

A. In John v. ii. This is God's record or testimony concerning his son, that he hath given us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He who believeth not this testimony makes God a liar; in Acts ii. 39. where Peter says to his hearers indiscriminately, “The promise is to you, and to your children and, as many as the Lord our God shall call :—and in Heb. iv. 1. where a promise of entering into God's

rest is said to be left even to those who are in danger of coming short of it :—and in other places of scripture.

Q- Is not this promise or grant implied in all the doctrine of the gospel concerning the person, offices and righteousness of Jesus Christ?

A Yes ; otherwise such doctrine would be no more good news to us than to the fallen angels.

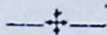
Q- What is the difference between the law and the gospel?

A- The law has no promise to sinners ;but , as proposed to them. consists of commands and threatenings ; whereas the gospel, which strictly speaking, contains neither commands nor threatenings, consists not only of doctrine concerning Christ, but also of free promises, which are directed to sinners to be believed, and which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. The law says, do this and thou shalt live. The gospel says, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. In the law God says, Thou has destroyed thyself: In the gospel he says, In me is thy help.

Q- How is the law subservient to the gospel?

A. In two ways: 1st, as it shews us our perishing condition without Christ: 2dly, as it binds us to believe what God reveals, and to receive what he gives us freely in the gospel. Strictly speaking, all the call and invitation in the word to come to Christ, belong

to the law.



SECTION III.

OF A SAVING INTEREST IN THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

Q. What is the mean by which sinners obtain a saving interest in the covenant of grace?

A. Faith in Jesus Christ.

Q. Does faith take hold of the covenant of grace, in taking hold of Christ?

A. Yes; for we have the whole of that covenant in him; whose justice satisfying righteousness is the fulfilled condition of it; in whom all the promises of it are yea and amen; and whom God gives to us as the all of the covenant, Isai. xlii. 6 I will give him for a covenant for the people.

Q. Why is faith, and not any other grace of the Spirit, the mean of our obtaining a saving interest in the covenant of grace?

A. Our saving interest in it is obtained by means of faith; only that it may appear to be of grace.

Q. How does it appear that our interest in this covenant, being obtained by faith only, must therefore be by grace?

A. Because faith brings nothing to Christ but sin and emptiness, and takes him with all the blessings

of this covenant in him to itself, upon no other footing than the free grant and promise of the gospel. Rom. iv. 14. "Therefore it is of faith, that it may be by grace."

Q Is this appropriating faith represented in scripture as the faith of God's people?

A. Yes: the language of their faith is constantly such as that in Psa. xxxi. 14. "O Lord, I said, thou art my God": and in Acts; xv. 2. "We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved."

Q. Can sinners attain this faith by the exertion of their natural ability?

A. They cannot come to Christ, John vi. 65. and they will not come to him. John v. 40.

Q. Is not their natural inbred attachment to the way of doing for life, one principal cause of their inability to believe?

A. Yes: this legal disposition, the apostle tells us, was the great cause of unbelief amongst the Jews in his time, Rom. x. 3. "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God."

Q. How is it possible, then, for sinners to believe in Jesus Christ to the saving of the soul?

A. It is not possible, unless it be given them on the behalf of Christ to believe, Phil. i. 29. "Saving

faith is an effect of supernatural grace, and of God's almighty operation, Eph. ii. 8. Colo. ii. 12.

Q. Is not the working of faith in the hearts of sinners ascribed to each of the persons in the Godhead?

A. Yes; it is ascribed to the Father. John vi. 44. ; and to the Son, Song i. 4. John x. 16. but especially, according to the economy of redemption, to the Holy Spirit; who is called the Spirit of faith, 2Cor. iv. 13.

Q. How doth the Holy Spirit work faith in the hearts of sinners?

A. By convincing them of the unspeakable misery of their natural or unregenerate condition, in which they are without God and without hope; by enlightening them in the knowledge of the gospel, as a free grant or promise of Jesus Christ, to be their righteousness and salvation, and of God in him to be their God; and by determining them to receive Christ as their Saviour, and God in him as their God, upon the footing of that free grace or promise

Q. What are some of the considerations that should encourage every hearer of the gospel to essay the exercise of this faith?

A. They are such as these: 1. That Jesus Christ is revealed as a remedy exactly adapted to the sinner's case, 1Cor. i. 30. and this remedy is revealed to him as the free gift of God on purpose that the sinner may receive and apply it, John vi. 32. 2. That the gospel promise is directed to him, Acts ii. 39. 3. That

God calls and commands him to believe in Christ, 1 John iii. 23. 4 That the sinner has now an opportunity of hearing and understanding the word by which the Holy Spirit works faith in us immediately, Rom. x. 17. as he works other graces and duties by faith. 5. That among other promises of God directed to sinners in the gospel, is the promise of his bringing them to believe in Christ, Zech. xii 10. Matth. xii. 21. Zeph. iii. 12. This is also included in the promise of the new heart, and of the Holy Spirit, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. 6. That he welcomes all sinners who are coming to him, John vi. 37. That he is a merciful and faithful High Priest, Heb. ii. 17. that has been found to be so by all that ever truly confided in him alone, or looked to him for salvation ; none of them having ever been ashamed or disappointed, Isa. xlv. 22. Rom. x. 11. 7. That we must essay to believe in Christ, before we can know, that the Holy Spirit does or will work faith in us, and that a sinner's essaying, as one deprived of all other help and relief, to believe in Jesus Christ, is one of the first signs of the beginning of that saving faith which is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, John iii. 8.

SECTION IV.

OF THE NATURE OF OUR COVENANT OF DUTY.

Q. Will not those who have taken hold of the covenant of grace be disposed to give their own selves to the Lord in a covenant of duty?

A. Yes; each of them is desiring to say, Oh Lord! truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant: thou hast loosed my bonds. Psal. cxvi. 16.

Q. How does our covenant of duty differ from the covenant of grace?

A. They differ in several respects: 1. The covenant of grace, as it stands fast with Christ, is the ground of our confidence before God; the ground of our hope of salvation: but our covenant of duty is not at all the ground of our hope. 2. The covenant of grace is our only security for salvation: but our covenant of duty is a solemn and formal declaration of our gratitude and thankfulness for salvation already secured. 3. Our covenant of duty differs from the covenant of grace, as any act or deed differs from the ground on which it proceeds: for the covenant of grace is the ground of our covenant of duty. In the covenant of grace revealed in the gospel dispensation, God is saying, I will be your God: upon this ground, we in our covenant of duty, vouch the Lord to be our God. In the covenant of grace, God says, ye shall be my people; I will cause you to walk in my statutes;

and ye shall keep my judgements, and do them. Upon this ground we engage in our covenant of duty to be the Lord's, to walk in his statutes, to keep his judgements, and do them. 4. It differs from the covenant of grace in the same manner as the hearing of the word, prayer, and other means, which the Lord makes use of in the administration of that covenant, differ from it; our covenant of duty being a mean of God's appointment, for promoting a sense of our own weakness, and of our absolute need of the grace and strength promised in the new covenant, in order to the acceptable preformance of duty. 5. Our covenant of duty and gratitude is frequently broken and needs to be renewed: But the covenant of grace can neither be broken nor renewed.

Q. Is vowing to the Lord different in its nature from our entering into a covenant of duty and gratitude?

A. By no means; for when a person vows, he acknowledges the Lord to be his God; and makes a solemn promise to him. He does nothing less in vowing, and he does nothing more in covenanting.

Q. Does not a person do something more, when he accompanies his vow with an oath?

A. He does nothing more than what is necessarily implied in every vow to the Lord: for we cannot make a vow to the heart-searching God, in which we do not tacitly, if not formally, appeal to him as to our

sincerity in doing so. Hence the expressions vowing to the Lord, and swearing to him, are used indifferently to denote the same exercise. Thus in the 19th chapter of Isaiah, what is called swearing to the Lord in the 18th verse, is called vowing to him in the 21st. When David swore to the Lord, he vowed to the mighty God of Jacob, Psal. cxxxii.

Q. Is not such covenanting implied in prayer and other religious duties?

A. Yes; when we call God our Father, and pray, that by his grace we may be enabled to serve him, our exercise implies a resolution and promise to serve him in the strength of that grace, as his obedient children. Our baptism includes an engagement to be the Lord's and a like engagement is implied in the communion we profess to have with Christ at his table.

Q. Is there not also a distinct and formal covenanting, which is, on some occasions, our duty?

A. Yes; such was the vowing of Jacob at Bethel, Gen. xxviii. 30. and such was that of David, Psalm cxix. 106.

Q. What are some of the circumstances that render our covenanting distinct and formal?

A. They are such as these: The setting apart of some time expressly for prayer and covenanting; a particular form of words containing our solemn covenant-engagements; the form of an oath; subscribing with the hand; the specifying in our engagement, of

some particular truths of God opposed, or duties neglected, or sins prevailing, which have been, wholly or partly, the occasion of our covenanting; a reference to former solemn covenant-engagements, the recognising or renewing of which is one end of our covenanting.

Q. Are all these particulars necessary in every instance of covenanting?

A. Though they are all sufficiently warranted by the examples of covenanting recorded in scripture; yet we do not say, that they are all equally necessary in every instance of it. The form of an oath, particularly, seems to be more necessary in public than in personal covenanting.

Q. What is personal covenanting?

A. It is the distinct exercise of a person in giving himself to the Lord as his God in Christ, and engaging to walk in his ways, upon the ground of the free promise of the covenant of grace, while he is pouring out his heart in prayer, having set apart some time expressly for that purpose.

Q. What is public or social covenanting?

A. It is that covenanting in which a number of people join publicly. Such was the covenanting of Israel at Horeb, and about thirty nine years afterwards in the plains of Moab; and also a little before the death of Josiah; in the reigns, too, of Asa, Joash and Josiah; and in the time of Nehemiah, *Exod. xxiv 7.*

Dent. xxix. 12. Josh. xxi. 25. 2. Chron. xv. 12 xxxiii. 31. Nehem. ix. 38. x. 28- 29.

Q. May not this public covenanting, be called national.

A. Yes; when the generality of the nation join in it. Such was the covenanting of the Jewish people in the examples now referred to. Such was the covenanting of the people of Scotland in the years 1581, 1590, 1638, and 1639. Such was the covenanting in the year 1643, when the solemn league and covenant was taken and subscribed by all ranks in Scotland and England; and in the year 1648. when the solemn league was renewed, with an acknowledgment of sins and engagement to duties, by all ranks in Scotland.

Q. Was it a peculiarity of the Old Testament dispensation, that the covenant engagements, which the children of Israel entered into, was binding upon their posterity?

A. There is no reason for such an opinion: for a solemn covenant-engagement to religion and reformation according to the word of God, having been entered into by a nation professing to belong to the church of God, is binding upon posterity; because the parties still subsist, the most high God being the one party, and the society which dies not, but continues in the succession of its members, being the other party; and because it binds us to do no duty, to pur-

the no end, but as we are bound by the the moral law. These reasons appear to be sufficient to infer the obligation of such covenant-engagements upon posterity now, as well as under the Old Testament.

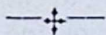
Q. May not a society annul such constitutions as have been made in former generations?

A. With regard to constitutions that respect the society itself alone; and those objects only which are ever in its own power; the members are at liberty, at any time, to change them when they find that such an alteration would conduce to the good of the whole. But the case of such constitution, is immensely different from that of the covenant-engagements now described; which are founded on the express command of God, and regard the rights of others, even those of God himself, which can never, without the grossest impiety and blasphemy, be said to be at the disposal of any society.

Q. If the majority of the nation disown the obligation of a covenant-engagement which their ancestors had entered into for religion and reformation; is it warrantable for the minor part who own that obligation, to renew the engagement?

A. It is not only warrantable, but their indispensable duty: the people of Judah did well in renewing their covenant, though the ten tribes who are under the same covenant obligations, refused to concur with them. The following words of the General Assembly

of the church of Scotland, in an exhortation to their brethren in England, in 1649, are excellent to this purpose: "Although there were none in the one kingdom who did adhere to the covenant; yet thereby were not the other kingdoms, nor any person in either of them, absolved from the bond hereof; since in it we have not only sworn by the Lord; but also covenanted with him. It is not the failing of one or more, that can absolve others from their duty or tie to him. — The covenant being intended and entered into by these kingdoms, as one of the best means of steadfastness, for guarding against declining times; it were strange to say that the backsliding of any should absolve others from the tie thereof." Agreeable to this doctrine, the people of Scotland, in 1648, had renewed the solemn league and covenant, though the English refused to join with them.



SECTION V.

OF THE WARRANTS FOR PUBLIC COVENANTING UNDER THE NEW TESTAMENT.

ARTICLE I.

Covenanting warranted by divine commands.

Q. Does God in his word command his people to

join in distinct and public covenanting?

A. Yes; we have an express command to vow to him in Psal. lxxvi. 11. Vow and pay unto the Lord your God.

Q. How does it appear that the vowing here enjoined is not peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation?

A. Because this vowing to the Lord is enjoined on the church in general; as the indispensable duty of all the members, of all that are round about him. But the vowing which was peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation, (such as that of the Nazarite, who vowed that no razor should come on his head, and that he should drink no wine,) was never enjoined on the church in general: it was at the option of persons either to enter into such a vow or not. The only vowing which was ever the common duty of church members was that which Moses describes as the whole import of the covenanting of Israel,—Deut. xxvi. 17, that is, the duty of avouching the Lord to be their God and of engaging to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken to his voice; a duty which is no other than such an acknowledging of the Lord to be our God, and such an endeavouring to worship and glorify him accordingly, as is required in the first commandment.

If the vowing here commanded, had been peculiar to

the Jewish church, then this command must have belonged either to the judicial or to the ceremonial law. Vowing to the Lord is a solemn act of religious worship; and therefore this command could not belong to the judicial law; for that law regulated civil affairs, and not the form of religious worship. Nor could it belong to the ceremonial law; since, as we have just now observed, there was no vowing, that could be pretended to be ceremonial, ever enjoined upon the church in general, as the common duty of its members.

Q. How does it appear that this command is not to be restricted to personal vowing?

A. That it cannot be so restricted appears, 1st. From the nature of vowing to the Lord; in which there is nothing that requires the command concerning it to be limited to personal vowing; more than there is in the nature of prayer, that requires the command concerning it to be limited to secret prayer. As a number of persons may join in fasting and prayer, so they so may join in vowing or covenanting, while there is nothing to be found either in the matter or the manner of it, but what is warranted by God's word. And his law, which is exceeding broad, binds us to embrace every opportunity of performing such duties in public and social, as well as in a private and personal capacity. 2dly. That this command ought not to be restricted to private vowing, appears from its

connexion with the rest of the 76th Psalm; which is a remarkable celebration of the public privileges and public deliverances of the church, and from its direction to the professing people of God in general: since the consideration of these two things, leads us to conclude, that the vowing and the other duties inculcated in this psalm, are rather public, than private or personal.

Q. Do we not sufficiently obey this command by partaking of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper?

A. If a person neglect formal and stated prayer, it cannot be said, that he sufficiently obeys the command of God to pray, because he meditates and has pious ejaculations, in which some exercise of prayer is, included. In like manner, if we neglect distinct formal vowing to the Lord, we do not sufficiently obey his command about this matter, by partaking of the sacraments in which vowing is implied. Ordinances ought to be distinctly observed, when the primary end of them is different. But this is the case with the sacraments and public covenanting; the primary end of the former being to signify and seal what God gives to us, that is, Christ and the benefits flowing from his death and resurrection: and that of the latter, being to declare in a solemn and explicit manner, what we resolve through his promised grace to give him, namely, ourselves and our endeavours to walk

in his ways. Our partaking of the sacraments supposes our mutual confidence in one another, as to our resolute adherence to those particular truths of Christ, which are at present in a special manner, the word of his patience; but public covenanting, as it specifies these truths, has a peculiar tendency to ascertain and establish such mutual confidence. After all; when the Lord Christ hath appointed us to acknowledge ourselves to be his in various ways; and when there is sufficient evidence that social and public vowing is one of these ways; is it not presumptuous in such poor short-sighted creatures as we are, to judge and determine it to be superfluous and unnecessary? In fine, vowing was as much implied in circumcision, and the passover under the Old Testament, as it is in baptism and the Lord's supper; and therefore if the command to vow to the Lord, was not in all cases sufficiently obeyed by partaking of the sacraments then, neither is sufficiently obeyed by partaking of them now.

Q. Is the command in Jer. iv. 6. "Thou shalt swear the Lord liveth in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness," to be understood as comprehending the duty of public and joint covenanting? A. Yes.

Q. How does it appear, that the command to swear, the Lord liveth, is rightly understood as a command to practise public covenanting?

A. One who says the Lord liveth, professes the true religion, or his belief of whatever the Lord has revealed concerning himself as the living God: thus

when he says in Jer. xlv. 26. My name shall no more be named by any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord liveth; the meaning is, that there should be none of the Jews professing the true religion left in that land. If then, saying, The Lord liveth, means, making a profession of religion; then it will follow, that swearing, The Lord liveth, means, the making of that profession with the solemnity of an oath. Professors of the true religion are described in Zeph. iii. 5. as those who worship, and swear by the Lord; in the original who swear to the Lord; alluding to the public covenanting in the reign of Josiah, when Zephaniah prophesied.

Q. Is the duty of swearing, The Lord liveth, here enjoined upon his people in their united capacity?

A. Yes: in the first verse, he calls Judah, that is, his church to return to him: and in the second verse, continuing to speak to Judah, he says, Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth. They were in this solemn manner to join together as church in returning to him.

Q. Are there any intimations in the New Testament of this duty?

A. It is certainly implied in various passages of the New Testament; particularly, Math. v. 33. where our Saviour approves this saying, Thou shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; as an important part, though not the whole of the meaning of the third command-

ment; and, while he shews, that all frivolous and unnecessary oaths are sinful, he intimates that there are oaths, the swearing of which is a part of religious worship, in which we give God the glory due to his name. Such are the oaths which are to be performed to the Lord. The oaths here meant are promissory oaths: not only those which are sworn by him as the witness of them; but also those which are sworn to him as the party to whom they are made. And there appears to be no reason for excluding our public and joint vows, as if they were not amongst the oaths which we are to perform to the Lord. It may be said to every person who joins in the public swearing of a solemn covenant engagement, It is thy oath: and therefore the use of the personal pronoun in the singular number. can be no objection to the sense in which we understand this expression. Nor can the solemn and joint manner in which a people present themselves to the Lord in public covenanting, be justly excluded from the import of the apostle's exhortation in Rom. xii. 1. "I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Here it is necessary to observe, that the sacrifices presented to God under the law, were both private and public. The private were those presented to him by individuals in their personal capacity; such as, the trespass-offering, the offering

for cleansing from the leprosy, the offering for a woman after child-bearing. The public sacrifices were offered in the name of Israel in their united capacity; such as, the daily morning and evening sacrifice; those that were appointed to be offered at the new moons, at feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of tabernacles, and on the day of expiation. Now, the apostle is justly considered as exhorting us to present ourselves to the Lord, not only in personal covenanting, as an Israelite presented his private sacrifice; but also in solemn joint covenanting; as the offering of all Israel was presented to God in public sacrifices. It is worthy of our observation, that some of the words here used by the apostle, are peculiarly adapted to express a public and joint presenting of ourselves to the Lord. Though it is the whole man that we are to present to him; yet the apostle exhorts us to present our bodies to him; and it is obvious, that the body is of greater consideration in the public, than in the private exercises of religion. Again, though his exhortation is directed to many, and he calls them to present their bodies to the Lord; yet he does not represent these bodies as many sacrifices; but as one sacrifice; because in this act, they are considered as one body presented to the Lord. In a similar manner, the unity of Christians is represented in their partaking of the Lord's supper. 1 Cor. x. 17. We, being many, are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. In fine, the

public covenanting of which we speak, is no other than a distinct, open and solemn manner of confessing Christ before men: a duty of so much importance, that he represents it as connected with his confessing of us before his Father who is in heaven, Matth. x. 32. To confess Christ is to confess his truths and ordinances, especially those that are meeting with opposition and reproach: and therefore Christ is most properly confessed, when such truths and ordinances are most explicitly and solemnly acknowledged, as is done in public covenanting.

Q. Is not such vowing to God agreeable to the light of nature.

A. Undoubtedly, for as we absolutely depend on God for our being, and all the good we enjoy, either as individuals, or as united in society; so we ought to be entirely subject to him, and to profess our subjection to be him in both these capacities. Nor can the profession our of subjection to him be too public or explicit. "God hath not only made you," said Epictetus, a heathen philosopher, "but hath bestowed all his benefits upon you. To this God, ye ought to swear, as the soldiers do to Cæsar."

ARTICLE. II.

Covenanting warranted by the approved examples of it recorded in Scripture.

Q. How does it appear, that the examples of distinct and formal covenanting under the Old Testament, are for our imitation?

A. It appears, that they are so, from three considerations.

Q. What is the first of them?

A. It is the consideration of the nature of the public covenanting of Israel, as being nothing more than an avouching of the Lord to be their God, and an engaging to walk in all his commandments and ordinances. Such is the account that Moses gives to the people of their covenanting. Thou hast this day, said he to Israel, avouched the Lord to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken to his voice. Deut. xxvi. 17. Thus it is evident, that their covenanting was of a moral nature; and therefore it is proper for our imitation.

Q. But did not the Israelites, in their covenanting, engage to observe the ceremonial law?

A. This is true; but it no more follows, that the example of their covenanting is improper for imitation, than it follows, that we ought not imitate their practice of praying, because they prayed for grace to enable them to the practice of ceremonial, as well as of moral duties. It is evident, that the nature of covenanting was always, what it is still, an avouching of Jehovah to be the God of his people, and engaging to

walk in his ways; though sometimes one thing, sometimes another, according to the varying situation and circumstances of the church, might be specified in the form of the solemn engagement. It is proper and necessary now to enter into a solemn covenant-engagement, to continue steadfast in the observation of the ordinances of the New Testament, as it was anciently to do so with regard to those of Old.

Q. What is the second consideration that serves to shew that the examples of covenanting under the Old Testament, are proper for our imitation?

A. It is this, that those particulars in their public covenanting, which rendered it distinct and formal, are proper for our imitation.

Q. What were these particulars?

A. They were such as the following: 1. The form of an oath, which was a solemn appeal made by the covenanters to God as to their sincerity in avouching the Lord to be their God, and in promising to walk in his ways. An oath may be as necessary for the honor of God and for our own and neighbour's good, in matters of religion, as in civil matters; and as necessary now under the New Testament, as ever it was under the Old: in which case, the use of it is a moral duty required by the third commandment. In the examples of public covenanting we find the form of an oath often mentioned as belonging to the solemnity of that work. When Israel, in the plains

of Moab, entered into covenant with the Lord their God, they entered into his oath, Deut. xxix. 12. In the time of Asa, they swore unto the Lord with a loud voice, 1 Chron, xv. 14. and in Nehemiah's time, they entered into a curse and into an oath. Nehemiah x. 29. 2. A form of words, which not only contained in general their profession of faith and their engagement of duty, but also specified certain particular truths or duties, which had been neglected or opposed; and to the profession and practice of which they now became expressly engaged. Thus, in the covenant entered into in Nehemiah's time, several particulars were specified, such, as their not intermarrying with the heathens around them, refusing to buy wares or any victuals on the Sabbath; forbearing the rigorous exaction of debts, and observing the rest of the seventh year. 3. A reference to former covenant-engagements, solemnly acknowledging the obligation of them; and confessing their sins as breaches of them, as well as of the divine law. Thus the purport of the covenant which the people entered into in the reign of Asa, was to seek the Lord God of their fathers; and in the covenanting of Josiah's reign, the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. Why, says the church in Malachi's time, do we deal treacherously by prophaning the covenant of our Fathers? 2 Chron. xv 12. xxxiv. 32. Malachi ii. 10. 4 The sub-

scription of the form of words containing their solemn proffession and engagement. We have a remarkable instance of sealing or subscribing the covenant in Nehemiah's time. In the tenth chapter of his book, we have first a list of eminent persons who sealed or subscribed; and then it is added, that the rest of the people subscribed, the priests, the Levites, the porters the singers, the Nethinims, and all that had separated themselves from the people of the lands, unto the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, every one having knowledge and having understanding. Thus there was an accomplishment of the promise in Isa. xlv. 5. One shall subscribe with the hand unto the Lord. 5. Their setting apart a day for that purpose of public covenanting, different from any day appointed for solemn worship by the law of Moses. Thus if we compare the last verse of the 8th chapter of Nehemiah with the first part of the 9th, chapter, after the people had been keeping the feast of the tabernacles seven days, the first of which was the fifteenth day of the seventh month, Levit. xxiii. 34. and the last the twenty first;—and after there had been a solemn assembly according to the manner on the eighth day of the feast, being the the twenty second of that month; they did on the twenty fourth observe a solemn fast, for which there was not any appointment in the law of Moses; in the close of which they solemnly renewed their covenant with the Lord;

shewing here by that they did not renew it as a Jewish church ; but under the character, common to the Old and New Testament dispensation, of a church or professing people. Lastly, they who joined in the covenanting of Israel; were not limited to persons of a particular office or tribe ; but all church-members ; the people in general, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge and having understanding.

With regard to these particulars, it is evident, that they are all as competent to the church of God now as they were under the old Testament, and that the examples of covenanting thus characterised, are manifestly proper for our imitation.

Q. What is the third consideration, from which it appears, that the examples of covenanting recorded in the history of the Old Testament, are proper for our imitation?

A. It is this, that we have an approved instance recorded in the New Testament of the actual imitation of these examples by the churches of Macedonia : which are said in 2 Cor. viii. 5. To have given their ownelves to the Lord. This giving of themselves to the Lord, was not as the apostles hoped ; it was more than they expected, and therefore it cannot be understood of the profession which the Macedonians made of subjection to the Lord in hearing the word and receiving the sacraments: for there could be no

church from which the observation of these ordinances was not expected. Nor can it mean their devoting a part of their substance to the use of the poor saints: for the dedicating of themselves to the Lord is plainly distinguished from the dedicating of their substance to him: they first did the former, and then the latter. In short, there is no necessity for supposing any other duty to be here meant by the expression, they first gave their own selves to the Lord, than such a solemn, joint and formal giving of themselves to him, as exactly corresponded with the covenanting of Israel under the Old Testament; as that was an avouching the Lord to be their God, and a joining themselves to the Lord, Deut. xxvi. 17. Jerem. 1, 5. The performance of this duty by the churches of Macedonia was unexpected by the apostles; because these churches had set about it according to the will of God declared concerning it in the Old Testament scriptures, without waiting for any new or express direction concerning it from the apostles. The occasion of their covenanting appears from v. 2 and 3, as connected with v. 5. to have been, their sense of the difficulty, whilst they were in deep poverty, of discharging the duty of ministering to the relief of the poor saints.

Q, But may it not be said, that this passage does not afford an example of public covenanting as now practised, because swearing is not mentioned in it?

A. It may as well be said, that the covenanting of

Israel at Horeb, or that of Judah, in the reign of Josiah, was no example of such covenanting, because swearing is not mentioned in the account of either of these instances: it may as well be said that we are not to understand the expression in Acts xx. 7. the disciples came together to break bread, as it is usually understood, of the celebration of the Lord's supper, because the cup is not mentioned. The truth is, we have here an example of a people vowing or devoting themselves publicly to the Lord: in which acts the substance of an oath, or an appeal to God as to their sincerity, is implied: and the warrantableness of adding the form of an oath (which cannot be pretended to be any peculiarity of the Old Testament) is plain from other places of scripture; and indeed from the nature of the case.

Q. Does this example afford any plea for the church-covenant used by some Independents?

A. Not at all: for the churches of Macedonia were already constituted, when they gave their own selves to the Lord: but the Independents use their churches, Again, several churches, that is, people forming several worshipping assemblies, (which might be under several sessions, presbyteries or synods) in Macedonia, joined in giving their own selves to Lord: whereas the Independent church-covenant is peculiar to one congregation or assembly that meets ordinarily for public worship, assuming to itself all church-power, unconn-

nected in order and discipline, with any other church. The covenanting of the Macedonians was occasional for if it had been a stated duty it could not have been unexpected by the apostles. But with the Independents, it is a stated rule, to require persons to enter into their church covenant in order to communion in sealing ordinances.

ARTICLE III.

Covenanting warranted by Divine prophecies respecting New Testament times.

Q. May we conclude, that an action is lawful or warrantable, because it is foretold in scripture?

A. By no means; some of the worst actions have been foretold; such as, that of the Jews in putting our Saviour to death, that of Judas in betraying him, and the anti-christian apostacy.

Q. In what respect then do the prophecies of covenanting, that was to take place under the New Testament dispensation, afford us a warrant for the practice of it?

A. In the same respect in which the scripture examples do so; for the instances of covenanting foretold in the prophecies, as well as those related in the history of scripture, belong to the approved practice of the

church in returning to the Lord

Q. What are some of the passages of scripture prophecy in which it is foretold that public covenanting should be attended to, and practised in New Testament times?

A. They are such as the following: Isai. xix. 18, 21. In that day, shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts. Yea, they shall vow a vow to the Lord, and shall perform it.* Isai. xlv. 5. One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the

* Some have supposed that this prophecy received its accomplishment, when Onias, a Jewish priest, about 149 years before Christ, obtained a licence from Ptolemy, Philometor and Cleopatra, to build a temple for the Jews in Egypt, like the temple at Jerusalem. There were continual feuds between the dispersed Jews and the Samaritans, on account of the different rites used in their respective synagogues. Onias, in order to extinguish these animosities, proposed that his temple should be common to both parties. His temple, however, was no more the accomplishment of this prophecy of Isaiah, than Ishmeal was the blessed seed promised to Abraham. Onias's temple was for the use of the dispersed Jews; but this pro-

name of Israel: † Isa. xlv 23, 24. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. Zech. xiii. 9. They shall say The Lord is my God.

Q. How does it appear that the vowing or covenanting foretold in these passages was to take place under the New Testament-dispensation?

phesy treats of the worship, not of the Jews in Egypt, but of the Egyptians themselves converted to the true faith. Again, the profession of religion here described is pure and agreeable to the scripture: it is the language of Canaan, founded in a true knowledge of Jehovah.

But the scheme of Onias was for communion with the Samaritans, who were gross apostates from the true religion; and for an agreement with them in forsaking the temple of Jerusalem, and in setting up another altar than that which God had appointed for the offering of sacrifices. Levit. xvii. 6, 7. Joshua xxii. 29. 2 Chron. vi. 8. See Vitringa on Isai. xix.

† The expression in this text, one and another, are not understood of different forms of profession: It is still the same word in the original, referring to the same party, amplifying the same profession.

Mr. Morrison's sermons on covenanting.

- A. It appears from the various events, which are connected in these prophecies with the vowing or covenanting foretold in them; and which sufficiently indicate the time of the New Testament dispensation. Such as, 1st, the exhibition of Jesus Christ in the gospel, and its ordinances among the Egyptians.* In this sense there was to be an altar in the midst of the land of Egypt. Christ is the altar on which our persons and services are offered up and made acceptable to God. We have an altar, says the apostle; even Jesus Christ, through whom our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God. Heb. xiii. 10. 1 Pet. ii. 5. The altar that was to be in Egypt cannot be understood literally of a material altar; for we do not find, that, after the time of Solomon, God ever allowed such an altar to be made, or sacrifices of animals to be offered, in any other place than Jerusalem. 2dly, The taking away of the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, and the establishment of a spiritual communion among the people of all nations. This is signified by Israel being the third with Egypt and Assyria, and by the Assyrians coming into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria. This is manifestly

* The Egyptians being among the first enemies of Israel, may be considered as representing the Gentiles in general.

a distinguishing character of the New Testament-dispensation.† But this was to be a time of vowing and swearing to the Lord of hosts. 3dly. The more plentiful out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, which is another distinguishing character of the New Testament-dispensation. John viii. 38, 39. where it is intimated, that the time, in which the Spirit in his gifts and graces should be given more abundantly, was to be after the glorification of Jesus. Accordingly the Lord promises to bring his church to the practice of distinct and public covenanting; to say, We are the Lord's; to subscribe with the hand unto the Lord, and to surname themselves by the name of Israel, when he should pour waters on him that is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; when he should pour his Spirit upon the seed of the church, and his blessing upon her offspring Isa. xliv. 3, 4, 5. 4thly the exaltation of Christ in human nature, and God's giving him a name which is above every name, to this end, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,--and every tongue confess. This is the distinguishing character of the time in which believers are to profess their faith in him, as the Lord their righteousness and strength, with the solemnity of an oath.

† It is remarkable that the phrase in that day, which is often used in promise that respect New Testament times, is repeated in Isa. xix. from the 18th to the 25th verse. no less than five times.

Isa. xlv. 23, 24. compared with Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11.

Q. Is it necessary to understand the expressions used in these prophecies of joint and formal covenanting?

A. Yes : if it is necessary to adhere to the native and literal meaning of the words, vowing, swearing and subscribing with the hand unto the Lord ; and to allow that they bear no other sense in these prophecies, than that which they bear in the historical relation of the practice of the Old Testament church. And that it is necessary to do so, must be admitted, unless it could be shewn, that our understanding these terms literally in the passages under consideration, would be inconsistent with the scope and connexion of these passages, or with the doctrine taught in other places of scripture. That it is not disagreeable to the scope and connexion of these passages, to understand the terms already mentioned literally, will appear by an impartial review of the passages themselves. Let us consider, for example, how these terms are used in the 19th chapter of Isaiah. The vowing there fore told, cannot mean such as is implied in prayer, or in the use of the sacraments ; for, according to the context, it is such vowing as has the formality of an oath ; it is a swearing to the Lord of hosts. Nor is it barely a profession of the true religion, that is intended by swearing to the Lord ; for that is signified by speaking the language of Canaan ;

as the expression, a pure language, must be understood in Zeph. iii. 9. So that it is here foretold, that God would have in Egypt and in other Gentile nations, a professing people, who should avow their adherence to the true religion with the solemnity of a formal oath. And that our adhering to the literal meaning of the terms now specified, as they are used in the prophecies under consideration, is not disagreeable to the doctrine taught in other places of scripture, must be evident to every one who considers the precepts and examples of public covenanting already adduced.

Q. Why may not the expressions, swearing, vowing, subscribing with the hand, be understood as figurative by setting forth New Testament worship under such names as are literally applicable to the worship of the Old Testament as is certainly the case with the terms, altar, sacrifice, incense, and others?

A. Because vowing to the Lord, swearing and subscribing to him, were never like the terms altar, sacrifice, incense and others, used to signify, literally, ceremonial forms of worship. They were used even under the Old Testament to denote moral worship; and therefore when they are applied to the worship of the New Testament church, we are under no necessity of departing from the native and literal sense of them.

Q. Does not the apostle Paul apply the words of the prophecy in Isa. xlv. 23. to another subject?

A. Yes ; he quotes them indeed in Rom. xiv. 11 and applies them to the absolute subjection, either voluntary or constrained, of all to Jesus Christ as the Supreme Judge at the last day. But though this be comprehended in the import of the text on account of the universal terms here used ; yet these expressions the knee shall bow, the tongue shall swear, are most applicable to the solemn declarations of our voluntary submission and obedience to him in religious worship, and especially in solemn covenanting.

Q. Is it any objection against the application of this text to public covenanting, that when the apostle cites it, he puts confessing to Christ, in stead of swearing to him?

A. By no means : for our public covenanting is an open and solemn confession of his name, of his authority, of his truths and institutions, of his cause and interest. This confession which we are to make before men, always carries in it the obligation of an oath ; and on proper occasions, we are called to make it with a formal oath : and why should we hesitate to, swear to him, at his call, and for his declarative glory who has sworn to us for the encouragement and confirmation of our faith in his promise?

Q. Does not God, in the words of the prophet, gives us the highest assurance, that he will carry on covenanting work in his church?

A. Yes ; for when he says, **I have sworn by myself**

the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear; nothing less can be meant, than that he shall always have a praying people, whom he will make willing to swear allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, saying, in him alone have we righteousness and strength.

Q. May we allow, that the duty of public vowing belongs to the old covenant, which God made with the people of Israel in the day when he took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; and which was superseded by the new covenant, according to Heb. viii. 13. In that he says "a new covenant," he maketh the first old: Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away?

A. This cannot be granted without admitting, what we know to be false, that the duty of public vowing belonged to the peculiarities of the Old Testament dispensation; or that moral duties were altered or annulled by the introduction of the New Testament dispensation. We can no more argue from this passage, that public covenanting was so peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation, as to be abrogated under the New,—than we can argue from it, that the privileges of the pardon of sin, of being the Lord's people, of having his laws written in their hearts, are so peculiar to the New Testament dispensation, that they were not obtained at all by believers under the Old. Both

these conclusions are equally absurd. The difference between the old and the new covenants mentioned in this passage, does not lie in the matter of the spiritual blessings here promised, which was attained by true believers under the Old Testament, as well as now; nor in the matter of the moral duties, which always belonged to the law written by the Holy Spirit in their hearts. But the difference lies in the clearer manifestation under the new covenant or testament, of the privileges and duties now mentioned; in freedom from the burthensome practice of the ceremonial law, and in the abolition of the national covenant of the Jews, so far as it was a partition wall between them and the Gentiles. The truth is, the obligation of God's people to join in public covenanting, is not less under the New Testament dispensation, but greater, than it was under the Old; as, they now enjoy a much clearer revelation of the covenant of grace, the promises of which are the ground upon which our covenanting proceeds.

Q. What are we to think of the objection which is often urged against public covenanting; that little or nothing is said of it in the New Testament?

A. The will of God with regard to public covenanting being clearly revealed both in the precepts and in the examples of it recorded in the Old Testament we would have been bound to receive and observe it though there had been no hint of it in the

New. There are various matters of faith and practice which we hold upon the authority of the Old Testament alone; such as, that there were six days from the beginning to the finishing of God's work of creation; that man's eating the forbidden fruit was his first sin; that a man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own. We might as well ask, why we have so little in the New Testament concerning the right of the infants of professing christians to baptism; or concerning the duty of observing the first day of the week, as the christian sabbath. In all these cases, it is sufficient, that the Lord's will is revealed to us in some parts or other of the scripture; the whole of which is the rule of our faith and practice. If the Lord hath sufficiently revealed his will concerning any moral duty, such as that of covenanting, in the Old Testament, it shews much pride and presumption, to refuse obedience, because he has not been pleased to repeat the revelation of it in the New. But the case of those who refuse to comply with the divine will with regard to covenanting, is still worse; for his will in this matter is certainly intimated even in the New Testament; but they refuse to acknowledge it, like those who deny infant-baptism; because it is not revealed so expressly, in such a manner, or in such terms, as they think fit. For it has been shewn that in the New Testament we have both precept and example to

warrant the practice of public covenanting. In truth the duty itself, in its general nature, is so congenial with the remains of the natural law in the hearts and consciences of men, and with the use of assertory and promissory oaths, which takes place in every civil society, that there is too much reason to fear, that the opposition of many to public covenanting, proceeds rather from their aversion to the particular truths and duties specified in the solemn covenant engagement, than from any real persuasion of the unlawfulness of engaging to them by a formal oath.

Q. Is there no weighty objection against public covenanting?

A. There is an objection or rather obstruction; which it is the work of God to remove.

Q. What is that obstruction?

A. It is the disaffection of the heart, which arises partly from corrupt bias of our nature, and partly from the power of temptation, which tends to darken the mind, and to hinder it from giving any due attention to the revealed will of God in this matter.

Q. May not persons, without saving grace, be convinced of this duty; and induced to join with others in it?

A. Yes; this appears to have been the case of many Israelites who joined in covenanting at Mount Sinai, but whose hearts were not right with God. Ignorance and neglect of duty are justly ascribed to our depraved

nature; and yet it does not follow that such conviction the mind as leads to an outward performance of that duty, is any certain evidence of saving grace.

Q. But are there not many gracious persons, or true believers, who cannot see public covenanting to be a duty in New Testament times?

A. Yes; just as Peter could not see the evil of teaching the Gentiles to observe the usages of the ceremonial law, on account of which evil Paul withstood him to the face: just as many whom we charitably judge to be partakers of saving grace, cannot see the evil of Prelacy, and of observing various superstitious ceremonies in the worship of God: just as many cannot see the duty of administering the initiating seal of the covenant of grace to the infants of such as are members of the visible church: yet their blindness in these respects must be ascribed to the power and deceit of indwelling sin, and to the influence of temptation: in these respects, we ought to withstand them to the face; because they are to be blamed; they walk not uprightly according to truth of the gospel.

Q. By what means does the Lord remove this obstruction to people's joining in public covenanting?

A. By correcting the evil bias of their minds; by disposing them to attend to the commands, examples, and prophecies of his own word concerning this duty, and also to the spiritual and evangelical nature and ends of it; and by discovering to them his authority,

wisdom, holiness and mercy in this, as well as in the other ordinances of the gospel.

Q. Was not the glorious reformation from Popery carried on in the way of solemn covenant engagements to the Lord?

A. It was carried on in this way in Germany and in France; in Scotland and England. The reformation was greatly advanced by several renovations of the national covenant of Scotland, particularly by that in the year 1638: it was still farther advanced by the solemn league and covenant of Britain and Ireland, which was sworn by persons of all ranks in these nations. The covenanting-work of that period was eminently countenanced by heaven; and a faithful testimony for it was sealed not many years after with blood of a multitude of martyrs. They loved not their lives unto the death for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.

Q. Should not the recollection of these things encourage the people of God to set about public covenanting as a mean of promoting the reformation of his church in our day?

A. Yes; for they are directed to go forth by the foot-steps of the flock: and to ask for the old paths, Song: 8. Jerem. vi. 16.

SECTION VI.

OF THE SEASON OF PUBLIC COVENANTING

Q. Whether is public and joint covenanting a stated, or an occasional duty?

A. It is an occasional duty.

Q. What is an occasional duty?

A. It is a duty that is not to be observed at stated times, like the sanctification of the sabbath, or prayer every morning and evening: but only as the cases and circumstances, to which it bears relation, occur: such are solemn fasting and covenanting.

Q. May this consideration, that public covenanting is an occasional duty, excuse those that decline to join in it at present?

A. It will not do so, unless it be indeed the case, that public covenanting is not seasonable at present.

Q. How may we know, whether it be so or not?

A. By considering whether the present state and circumstances of the church be such as those to which the nature and special ends of this duty bear a manifest relation and which gave occasion to any of the approved instances of it mentioned in scripture.

Q. May we conclude, that public covenanting is not seasonable at present, because the church is not now persecuted by the hand of the evil magistrate?

A. We may not ; for when there is no such persecution, the church may be in great distress from prevailing errors, offences and reproaches. There was no persecution on account of religion by the Jewish government in the reign of Asa, Hezekiah, or Josiah ; or even by the Persian government in the time of Nehemiah ; and yet these were most remarkable seasons of covenanting, under the Old Testament. Whereas if the time of persecution on account of religion were the only, or even most proper time for public covenanting, we should of had the most remarkable example of it in such a long persecuting reign as that of Manasseh ; during which reign we have no hint that any attempt was made to set about this duty.

Q. Whether is it more proper to use public covenanting as a mean against violent attempts to take away civil and religious liberty ; or as a mean against a remarkable prevalence of error and other corruptions affecting the church as a spiritual society?

A. It is more proper to use it as a mean against the latter: 1. Because every instance of public covenanting recorded in scripture was directed against idolatry and other evils, in principle or practice, affecting the church as a spiritual society. 2. Because the use of public covenanting against such evils is most agreeable to the nature of it, as belonging to the religious worship of God in the church, and as

proceeding upon spiritual and evangelical principles.

3. Because, if an association were necessary against attempts to deprive us of our civil and religious liberty, the bond most proper for such a design, would be a political or civil one, in which every peaceable citizen, well affected to the cause of such liberty, should be admitted to join, though of different religious sentiments.

Q. May we conclude, that public covenanting is not seasonable in this country, because the majority of the inhabitants, and the civil rulers, refuse to concur in it or to countenance it?

A. By no means: for. 1. Public covenanting is an ordinance of Divine worship, which the church of Christ, as his independent kingdom. (which is not of this world,) ought to observe at his call, without regard the favor or disfavor of the world or its rulers. 2. Although, in examples of public covenanting recorded in the Old Testament, the civil rulers and the generality of the nation concurred; yet there is nothing in the nature of this duty which rendered such concurrence necessary to the right performance of it. The open, explicit and solemn avouching of the Lord to be our God, and engaging to walk in his ways; may be the joint act of a smaller, as well as a greater number. 3. Church members under the New Testament, do not, as they did under the Old, compose one particular nation, but are scattered through the va-

rious nations of the world; a circumstance from which those of a particular country may be often called to set about public covenanting, when they make but a very small part of inhabitants, and, if not directly opposed, are unnoticed by the civil rulers. Thus it was foretold, that, in the New Testament-day, five cities, that is a few of a great many in the land of Egypt, (which was celebrated for its population, and the number of its cities,) should swear to the Lord of hosts. The people of the churches of Macedonia, who gave themselves to the Lord, were no doubt but a small part of the inhabitants of that extensive country. Public covenanting may be begun by a few, and afterwards may become national. Before the reformed religion was established in Scotland, forms of association were subscribed in the different shires, and in the year 1557, they entered into a covenant, to promote the reformation. About 24 years afterwards, the national covenant was entered into by the rulers and the body of the nation.

Q. Can you give any reasons why we ought to hold that solemn, distinct and joint covenanting is seasonable at present?

A. Yes, several may be given.

Q. What is the first that occurs to you?

A. Public covenanting is seasonable at present, because in bearing testimony against the errors and corruptions that now prevail in the reformed churches

we profess to be endeavouring to bring about a public reformation. But the examples of public covenanting recorded in the scripture shew, that it is a proper season for the performance of that duty, when the people of God are essaying a public reformation. Such was the occasion of the covenanting in the reigns of Asa and Josiah, and in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The reformation from Popery in the 16th, century, and the reformation from Prelacy in the 17th, were both times of public covenanting.

Q. Do you recollect a second reason?

A. Yes: Public covenanting is seasonable at present, because they who have made a good profession of Christ's name, and of adhering to a faithful testimony against the prevailing errors and corruptions of our time, are under peculiar temptations to draw back. In such a case, they are called to join in public covenanting, as a proper mean of promoting their steadfastness. Moses, when he exhorted the people of Israel to constancy in cleaving to the truths and ordinances of God, bade them remember the day, on which they stood before the Lord in Horeb. Deut. iv. 9, 10. Public covenanting is of much the same nature with that solemn and explicit profession of faith in Jesus Christ, which he called the twelve apostles to make, when many professed disciples went back and walked no more with him. John vi. 67. Then said Jesus to the twelve, Will ye also go

away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Q. What is a third reason?

A. Public covenanting is seasonable at present, on account of the jealousies and misunderstanding that prevail amongst professors; as it is an appointed mean of removing them; and of promoting mutual confidence. When the children of Reuben and the children of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were going to take possession of the country of Gilead, they built an altar near the Jordan. When this was reported to the other tribes, they were apprehensive, that the altar was raised for some idolatrous purpose. On this occasion, those of the two tribes and the half, gave the other tribes an explanation upon oath, of their design in building the altar, Joshua xxii. 22-29. Public covenanting is a solemn explanation upon oath, of the design of our religious profession, particularly in the controverted articles of of it, and tends to unite the hearts and hands of the Lord's people in the maintenance of that profession.

Q. What is a fourth reason?

A. Public covenanting is seasonable at present because after other means have been used, for the conviction of the opposers of the testimony which we maintain for the doctrine and order of the church

of Christ, such as, reasoning, warning, reproof, we are not to withhold this farther mean of their conviction, the public declaration of our joint adherence to it with the solemnity of an oath. Here our Lord Jesus has given us an example: for he, having been employed about three years and an half in teaching and working stupendous miracles among the Jews, and having been despised and rejected by their leading men and by the body of the nation, at last closed his ministry with an express declaration of his divinity upon oath before their supreme judicature. Matth. xxvi. 63, 64. The high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether, thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said; (or as it is in the parallel place in Mark xiv. 62. And Jesus said, I am;) And ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power.

Q. Have you any farther reasons for maintaining that public covenanting is seasonable at present?

A. One or two very obvious reasons may be added. The present time is a proper season for public covenanting, because it is a time of suffering, with such as faithfully adhere to a testimony for reformation-principles. Their cause meets with much unjust contempt and reproach. This is distressing to those who have that cause at heart, and who know it to be the cause of God and truth. They feel what the Psalmist felt, when

he said, As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily to me, where is thy God? Again it is a time of distress on account of God's judgments. How manifold spiritual judgments are we under already! The Lord is hiding his face and with drawing from us both in public ordinances and in our retirements. Deadness, formality, and other spiritual plagues prevail: and how awful are the temporal judgments which are likely to follow the spiritual! We have ground to say with the Jews in Nehemiah's time: We are in great distress: and because of all this we make a sure covenant. We should, therefore, essay to return to the Lord in the way of public covenanting, as good Josiah did, and caused the people of Judah to do, when he was under distressing apprehensions of the great wrath of God, about to be poured out upon them, because their fathers had not kept the word of the Lord, Nehemiah ix. 38. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 21. 31, 32.

In fine, the present time is a proper season for covenanting, because the obligation of the solemn covenant-engagements entered into by our fathers is in a great measure forgotten. Public covenanting is a proper mean of reviving the sense of that obligation: for when we engage in public covenanting to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, we acknowledge not only the primary obligation we are under to do so from the Divine law, but also the

secondary from the covenanting of our fathers. Thus when the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Josiah's time entered into a covenant before the Lord, they did according to the covenant of God,—the God of their fathers, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 32. As the Lord still reproved and they confessed their sins as breaches of the covenant of their fathers; their covenanting conformably to such reproving and confessing, recognised their former covenant transactions; in which they avouched the Lord to be their God, and he avouched them to be his people, Deut. xxvi. 17, 18.



SECTION VII.

OF THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SINS.

Q. Ought not every person who proposes joining in the solemn covenant-engagement, to be previously exercised in reading and considering both it and preceding acknowledgment of sins?

A. Yes surely: for every one is to vow unto the Lord with knowledge and understanding; and is to swear, the Lord liveth, in judgment as well as in truth and righteousness. Nehem. x. 28. Jerem. iv 2.

Q. Why ought we to confess the public sins of our fathers; as we do in the beginning of the acknowledgment of sins?

A. Because being public, they were the sins of the church or nation; which continues under the guilt of them, until they are acknowledged, lamented, and forsaken. Hence the covenanters in Nehemiah's time made a large confession of the sins of their fathers: Our fathers, say they, dealt proudly and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments: they wrought great provocation.

Q. When did the Lord bring our fathers under solemn covenant-engagements to be his people, and to abide in the profession and practice of the true religion?

A. There were two remarkable periods of the covenanting of our fathers. The one was that of the national covenant of Scotland which was sworn and subscribed by the body of the people there in the year 1580. It was levelled against Popery; which was then almost the only system of error against which the faithful in that land had to contend: It was renewed several times; particularly in the year 1638, with a bond suited to the state of the church at that time. The other was that of the solemn league and covenant, which was taken and subscribed by all ranks in Scotland and England in the year 1643. This covenant was for the abolishing of the lordly prelacy and superstitious forms of worship, relics of Popery, which had, before this time been retained in the church of England; and for bringing the three kingdoms to

nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church government, directory for worship and catechising.

Q. Are these covenants still binding?

A. They certainly are: for an oath, entered into by a particular church with regard to matters required in the moral law, cannot fail to bind, and as far as there is an opportunity of knowing the obligation to have its effect either in exciting to the practice of duty, or in aggravating guilt, as long as that church subsists.

Q. Is it a sufficient assertion of the obligation of these covenants to say, that we are bound to all moral duties therein contained according to our circumstances?

A. By no means; for that may be said by those who deny the lawfulness of such engagements altogether. If neither we nor our forefathers had entered into these covenants, we would not have been under the obligation of them all; but we would have been bound by the Divine authority, as much as we are, to practice the moral duties therein contained. We are bound to these duties by various precepts of the first and second tables of the law; but the obligation of the covenants is founded in the third precept only.

Q. Do these covenants bind us to do any thing which is not our duty in our present circumstances?

A. No; the supposition is absurd and inconsistent.

with the purport of these covenants as engagements to endeavour the reformation of religion according to the word of God ; and that no otherwise than according to our several places and callings.

Q. It is granted that the people of Scotland and England are under the obligation of these covenants ; but how can we in America be so ?

A. Because the greater part of the presbyteries in churches in America are composed of the descendants of those who had emigrated from Britain and Ireland, and were considered as having proceeded immediately from the presbyterian churches there, after these churches had entered into the covenant of which we speak. it was a privilege that they had attained when they left Britain that they were devoted to the Lord their God in these covenants, and that which they had attained, our Lord charged them to hold fast.

Q. Do we not, then, acknowledge the sins here specified, not only as breaches of the Divine law, but also as breaches of these covenants ?

A. Yes.

Q. What was the iniquity of our fathers with regard to these covenants ?

A. It was that of breaking, burning, and burying them.

Q. What is the iniquity of the present generation with regard to these covenants ?

A. The open denial of their obligation by multitudes, and the reproach cast upon those who were persecuted to the death for their assertion of that obligation, as having suffered, like a parcel of fools, for a mere whim. But the Lord will have the cause for which they suffered effectually vindicated as his own cause in due time.

Q. What other sins are here acknowledged as public evils of the present generation?

A. Such as these ; a deluge of abominable heresies overflowing the land ; the profanation of the name and Sabbath of the Lord ; the neglect of his public worship by many ; and the corruption of it by the obstinate attachment of others to the modes and forms which have been introduced into it by men's invention ; the countenance that is given by multitudes to those who take upon them to be public teachers without any regular call ; the practice followed by many of hearing the instruction which, by their own confession of faith, is such as causeth to err from the words of knowledge ; the contempt of the appointed government and discipline of the church of God, even by many called Presbyterians, who deny Presbyterial or church-government to be his ordinance ; neglecting to renew our solemn covenanting-engagements in this land ; the administration of the seals of the covenant to those who have erred from the faith, or who are irregular or offensive in their practice ; many not

scrupling to leave the ordinances and society of his people, without necessity, in order to increase their worldly wealth; many wasting the bounties of Providence in drunkenness and revellings.

Q. What are the family sins here acknowledged?

A. Such as those of parents in neglecting to season the minds of their children with the knowledge of the truth concerning the ruin of mankind in the first Adam, the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ, and the duty required of them; in not restraining them from that way which seems right in the eyes of foolish youth; and in readily allowing them to join with vain persons, and to hear the instruction which causeth to err; in not worshipping God in secret and in their families morning and evening; in not remembering the Lord's day to keep it holy; and in no wise framing their lives in other respects according to the rule of the word, thus setting an evil example before children: so that the children, following the parents in carelessness and wickedness, at length exceed them, and one generation rises up worse than another.

Q. What are the personal sins here acknowledged?

A. Unbelief, by which men turn away from the only Saviour, count the God of truth a liar, and seal their own condemnation; prevailing heart aversion to Christ's yoke; from which it follows, that persons are restrained from evil rather by a fear of church-censure than by a fear of offending God; and are dis

posed to join with the world in revellings, in drunkenness, in filthy or profane conversation, and in unjust practices,—when they imagine their sin may be hid from the courts of the Lord's house: the earthliness of our minds manifesting itself in various ways, particularly in vain and unprofitable conversation on the Lord's day; want of due concern about the presence and blessing of the Lord in attending his ordinances; so that we have not heard his voice, nor seen his glory, nor enjoyed that refreshing communion with him which has been the attainment of many of the saints that have gone before us; not profiting by the word preached, not mixing it with faith; so that we have often been as the door on its hinges, moving backward and forward, yet remaining in the same place; nor observing and improving, as we ought, the grace of our Lord Jesus signified, represented and sealed to the children of the promise in the sacrament of baptism: not manifesting an earnest desire to meet the Lord at his holy table, in a careful examination of our state and exercise, according to the word,—in fervent and frequent supplication at the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need, and in flying from all our labors and frames to the Lord Jesus, as the sure refuge of the guilty, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, and whose name is the Lord our righteous-

ness; the abounding of offences by which great occasion has been given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; while few of us have been led by the out-breaking of sin in others to duly humbling views of the deceit and desperate wickedness of our own hearts; our having been often a snare to our neighbours and brethren, instead of laboring, as we ought to have done for their good; little in our speech and behaviour having been profitable to others; and much of a pernicious tendency; malignity often visible in hard speeches and ill-grounded surmises; the love, which thinketh no evil, which envieth not, which seeketh not its own, being scarcely to be found. Our sin in these and in other respects, is exceeding great before the Lord.

Q. Is not an acknowledgment of public, family, and personal sins necessary in order to our entering into the covenant-engagement to duties.

A. Yes; for we will not be sincere and hearty in our professions of returning to the Lord, unless we are sensible of the manifold instances of our departure from him, and acknowledge them accordingly.

SECTION VIII.

OF THE SOLEMN COVENANT-ENGAGEMENT UNTO
DUTIES.

Q. If persons be sincere in acknowledging their iniquities, will they not, of course, be disposed to join in an engagement to the opposite duties?

A. Yes; for when a person confesses sin with heart felt sorrow for the dishonour thereby done to God, he cannot but resolve and promise to endeavor through grace after new obedience.

Q.] [How is this bond divided?

A. Into four parts.

Q. What does the first part consist of?

A. Of a profession of our faith in Jesus Christ, and a general engagement to duty.

Q. Does not a profession of our faith in Jesus Christ properly go before our engagement to duties?

A. Yes.

Q. Why so?

A. Because persons are in no capacity for coming under an engagement to duties, till they be brought to rest on the blood of Christ for purging of their consciences from dead works, to serve the living God; and till they be directed to go to Christ by faith for grace and to enable them to vow and perform their vows.

Q. May not persons enter into an engagement to

duties, in order to get conscience pacified, or as mean of obtaining a saving interest in Christ?

A. They may not; for in doing so, they would attempt to repair the broken covenant of works, and to establish their own righteousness.

Q. Are not we naturally prone to this legal way of vowing?

A. Yes the generality of the Israelites at Sinai appear to have vowed in this way; and therefore the Lord said concerning them, O that there were such an heart in them! Duei. v. 29. for though they expressed their desire of a Mediator, yet they were wedded to the way of doing for life. And it is to be feared that this is still too much the case with the members of the visible church.

Q. What is the profession of faith which we make before our engagement to duties?

A. We profess "our desire to be found in Christ; "we acknowledge him to be the only propitiation for "sins: and through divine aid, according to the measure "of grace given to us, we do with the whole heart, take "hold of his surety-righteousness, as the only ground "of our access to, and acceptance with God; we set "our seal to all the promises of God, which are in him "yea, and in him, amen; receiving them as our charter "for the heavenly inheritance. We avow his word to be "the only rule of our faith and practice; and we take "his Spirit for our only guide unto all the truth re-

“vealed in his word.”

Q. In what terms is the general engagement to duty here expressed?

A. In these words: “We promise and swear by the great and holy name of the Lord our God, that we shall unfeignedly endeavor to walk in his ways, to keep his commandments, and to hearken to his voice—in love to him who hath delivered us out of the hand of our enemies, serving him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

Q. What is the rule of the duty to which we here engage?

A. The moral law.

Q. Whether is the moral law to be here considered as the covenant or law of works or as the law of Christ?

A. It is to be here considered as the law of Christ. 1 Cor. 9 21. We are not without law to God, but under the law of Christ.

Q- What is the difference between the law of works and the law of Christ?

A. The law of works requires men's obedience as the condition of eternal life, Matth. xix. 17. but the law of Christ requires obedience as a testimony of gratitude for eternal life as already obtained by Jesus Christ. No obedience to the law of works is acceptable to God but that which is absolutely perfect; whereas imperfect obedience to the law of Christ, if it be sincere, and

proceed from true faith in Christ, is acceptable to God through him. All men in their natural state are under the law of works; and therefore it speaks to them; but believers are wholly set free from the law of works: they alone are under the law of Christ; Rom. iii. 19. vii. 4.

Q. What is the motive under the influence of which we engage to yield obedience to the law of Christ?

A. The motive of love to him who hath delivered us out of the hand of our enemies.

Q. What does the second part of this bond respect?

A. Our profession of religion.

Q. How do we engage to adhere to our profession of religion?

A. "We engage to continue steadfast in the faith, profession, and obedience of the true reformed religion, in doctrine, worship, Presbyterial church government and discipline, as the same is held forth to us in the word of God, and received in this church, and testified for by it against the manifold errors and latitudinarian schemes prevailing in the United States of North America."

Q. What is meant by true reformed religion?

A. It is that which our forefathers bound themselves and their prosperity by the solemn league and covenant to maintain, and which is clearly exhibited in the West-minister confession of faith, the form of

presbyterial church-government, the directory for the public worship of God, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Q. How are we to understand these words "as same is received in this church, and testified for by it?"

A. It is to be understood as referring to our declaration and testimony for the doctrine and order of the church of Christ, containing a farther explanation of various articles of the true reformed religion; according to which explanation we receive the doctrine of the Westminster confession.

Q. What are the manifold errors which we engage to testify against?

A. They are especially such as are pointed out in the declaration and testimony already mentioned.

Q. What is meant by latitudinarian schemes prevailing in the United States?

A. They are lax schemes of church-communion, according to which all who may be charitably supposed to be good christians, ought to be admitted to communion in sealing ordinances, notwithstanding their open and obstinate maintaining of many errors in doctrine, worship, or church government; provided these errors are not deemed essential; while many abettors of these lax schemes teach, that it is unwarrantable for any church to require adherence to a confession of faith, as a term of church communion; and

that people may warrantably hear a public teacher, whose instruction, according to their own confession of faith, is unsound, and such as causeth to err from the words of knowledge.

Q. Are there not various latitudinarian schemes followed in this land?

A. Yes; some would comprehend in one church-communion all that own the scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be a rule of religion, and Jesus Christ to be the true Messiah. Some would have church communion extended to all sorts of Protestants, even to those who avow their attachment to opinions manifestly contrary to the received doctrine of the reformed churches, and who openly and obstinately persist in the use of some Popish ceremonies in the worship of God, and in the denial of the divine warrant for infant baptism and for presbyterial church government. Some contend for an occasional communion with christians of another denomination with whom they decline fixed communion.

Q. How does the evil of every latitudinarian scheme of church-communion appear?

A. It is evidently sinful in several respects:

1. As it is a toleration of those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have received as the doctrine of Christ, Rom. xvi. 17.

2. As it is directly contrary to the duty incumbent on the church of Christ, to hold fast what she attain-

ed, and to walk accordingly, Rev. ii. 25. iii. 11. Philip. iii. 16.

3. It is directly contrary to the solemn charge which Christ gave his church to teach her members to observe all things whatsoever he hath commanded them: For it is plain, that a church is not faithfully teaching a doctrine or duty while she receives the open and obstinate opposers of that doctrine or duty into her communion, or retains them in it, Matth. xxviii 19, 20.

Q. May not latitudinarians excuse themselves by saying, that they only mean that such an article of a human composition called a creed, a confession, or a testimony, should not be a term of church-communication?

A. This is no proper excuse, but a mere shift: for with regard to any such article, the true state of the question is, whether the matter of it be a doctrine or duty expressed or necessarily implied in the words of the holy scripture: if it be so, the church cannot neglect requiring her members to receive and observe it without trampling upon the authority of Christ. The truth is, latitudinarians cannot excuse their neglect of any such article, otherwise than by shewing that the matter or import of it is not founded in the words of the holy scriptures.

Q. What engagement do we come under in the next place, with regard to our profession of religion?

A. "We declare our resolution through grace to watch against those snares which either are, or may be laid to draw us and our brethren into that defection from the Lord, and into that detestable neutrality in his cause, which prevail at this time ;—taking heed to ourselves, lest we be deterred from going forward in his way by revilings of men, or seduced by their fair speeches."

Q. What is the third engagement that we come under with regard to our profession of religion?

A. "We promise that we shall sincerely and constantly labour, in our places, and stations, by all means which are of divine appointment, to promote the knowledge of Christ in the land, and to maintain the purity of doctrine and order in his church ;—particularly, endeavouring that those, who are known and declared enemies to the truth, may neither be received into our-fellowship, nor retained in it "

Q. How is it competent to private persons to promote the public reformation of religion according to this engagement?

A. All are bound to labour for the welfare of the church: her office-bearers in their more eminent stations ; and her other members in their private stations. There are various ways in which the weakest of the friends of Christ, in a private station, may promote the public reformation, such as, steadfastness in their profession, earnest prayer, and an exemplary

conversation.

Q. What is the fourth engagement with regard to our profession of religion?

A. "We engage in the strength of the Lord to follow after that peace which is founded upon an agreement in the truth, that we may stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Q. What does the third part of this bond respect?

A. A practice becoming our holy profession.

Q. How is this part of the bond introduced?

A. With a confession, "that we often fail in our practice, neglecting what the Lord requires, and doing that which he forbids; and with a profession of our faith in Jesus, who saves his people from their sins, and of our desire to depend wholly on the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, and which teacheth us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Q. What do we promise in this bond, with regard to our personal deportment?

A. Three things.

Q. What is the first of these things?

A. "The study of a universal reformation in heart and life; endeavouring to have always a conscience

void of offence towards God and towards man; attending to the duties enjoined in both tables of the law, and setting a good example to each other."

Q. What is the second?

A. Guarding against the influence of evil example and seduction: when sinners entice us, we resolve, that, through the grace of God, we shall not consent to them, nor follow a multitude to do evil."

Q. What is the third?

A. "Patience under our own troubles, and sympathy towards others in distress: knowing that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God; and that all, who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must make account of enduring persecution, less or more, from this evil world, depending on God as a very present help in trouble; we shall, through his aid, study patience under the rod, and meekness of spirit towards such as may injure us, and sympathy towards all men in distress, especially those of the household of faith."

Q. What is the fourth part of the bond?

A. The conclusion.

Q. What is observable in this part of this bond?

A. Three things. 1. An appeal to God as to our sincerity. 2. How upright covenanters hope to be enabled to an acceptable performance of their vows, "under a humbling sense of their own weakness, they depend on God, the Father of Mercies, whose

Holy Spirit helps his people in all their infirmities.’
 3 The end they aim at in the performance of their
 vows: ‘That they may live to the praise of his grace
 in the churches.’

SECTION IX.

OF THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR COVENANT

ENGAGEMENTS.

Q. Is it not incumbent on those who have entered into solemn covenant-engagements, to perform them?

A. Yes: *when thou vowest a vow unto God, saith Solomon, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.* Eccles. v. 4. The vow here spoken of is to be understood of an engagement to the practice or forbearance of things in their own nature indifferent: and therefore, it is added better, it is that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. This is not applicable to the public vowing which is incumbent on the church of God in general, according to Psal. lxxvi, 12. Isa. xix. 21. for a person's refusing to join with the people of God in such public vowing is exceeding sinful; and is a cause of deep humiliation before the Lord. But though Solomon is treating here of those peculiar vows that persons enter into with regard to things of

an indifferent nature; yet what he said concerning the duty of paying such vows holds even with greater force in the case of the engagements we have come under in public covenanting: for if it is necessary to perform our engagements to God with regard to things that are otherwise indifferent; it is much more necessary to perform those which, as to the matter of them, are nothing but moral duty.

Q. Will they who continue under the broken covenant of works, and are strangers to the covenant of grace, perform their covenant-engagements?

A. No; for they are under the curse; Gal. iii 10, which, while they continue under it, excludes them from that grace, without which they can do nothing that is spiritually good.

Q. Who then will be enabled to an acceptable performance of their vows?

A. They who, in their covenanting, renounce the covenant of works, and take hold of the covenant of grace: or they who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the condition of that covenant was perfectly fulfilled, and in whom all the promises of it are yea and amen; entirely free and inviolably sure to everyone that believes.

Q. On what ground do believers trust, that they shall be enabled to the performance of their engagements to the Lord?

A. Not on the ground of their promise to God;

but on the ground of his free promise, made in Christ to them, of all the grace and strength necessary to the acceptable performance of their vows. In dependence on the divine promise, each of them ought to say with the Psalmist, I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

Q. May they not expect to be enabled in this life to keep the commandments of God perfectly?

A. No; they have engag'd and hope to keep them no otherwise than as God hath promised to enable them to do so. He has not promised to enable them in this life to keep his law perfectly, but to keep it acceptably, and to go on towards perfection; to have respect to all his commandments, and to hate every false way; and particularly to hate the corruptions in principle or practice, against which they expressly engage to contend and testify.

Q. May true believers break their covenant-engagements, and fall away from them totally?

A. No; they are secured against such a breach by the promise of the covenant of grace, Jerem. xxxii 40 I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my tear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

Q. But are they not liable to a partial and temporary breach of their covenant engagements?

A. Yes, even wise virgins may slumber and sleep

Matth. xxv. 5.

Q. What is the best means of guarding against such a breach of covenant engagements?

A. A single and habitual dependence on the grace which is in Christ Jesus, for enabling us to perform, as well as to make our vows. Abide in me, says Christ and I in you: as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit:—for without me, ye can do nothing.

Q. What account are we to make of our performance of covenant engagements?

A. We are to account ourselves unprofitable servants, and all our performances as nothing, when compared with God's commandment, which is exceeding broad; and with what we owe in point of gratitude for the gift of Christ.

Q. What account will the Lord Christ make, at his second coming, of that performance of our vows which is attained by faith in his name and promise?

A. He will take notice of it as an acceptable testimony of our gratitude and regard to his glory. He will say to every one who giveth such evidence of his saving interest in the covenant of grace; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."